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ON THE FOUNDATIONS

OF

MORALS.

FOUR SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

NOVEMBER 1837.

BY THE

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FELLOW AND TUTOR OF TRINITY COLLEGE.

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TO THE

Rev. JULIUS CHARLES HARE,

RECTOR OF HURSTMONCEAUX, SUSSEX.

My Dear Hare,

If in writing a multitude of books there is much weariness, there is at least this satisfaction;—that the writer may sweeten each portion of his toil, by making it the memorial of some valued friendship. I look upon the following pages with much greater pleasure, because I have prefixed your name to them; and I turn the speculations which they contain with a more cheerful and kindly spirit, because they carry me back to the days in which you still resided in our much-loved Trinity College;—when I had the delight of constant intercourse with you, and such themes were not unfamiliar to our conversation. In the main purpose of my Sermons, I know that I shall have you for my favourer, for I had you for my forerunner.

You are now removed from us, to my great sorrow and that of many more; and are transferred to a situation where your daily walk is among the practical duties and household feelings, which you cultivate so earnestly and well, and which, if I am not mistaken, you deem

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the fit employment and true business of man. Nor am I disposed to doubt that such a life is, for most men, more truly wise and happy than one in which our tasks lie chiefly in the world of speculation; and in which the principal events consist in our own solitary intellectual struggles. Yet to you I may say, without any doubt of receiving your assent, that this employment of Guessing at Truth, is both in itself praiseworthy; and, if carried on with a humble trust in the Divine Giver of all Truth, is full of deep and wide sources of practical blessing. I therefore dedicate these Discourses to you, in the full confidence of receiving from you, not only the kind wishes of a friend, and the interest of a lover of speculative truth, but the approbation of a good man.

I am always, my dear Hare,

Affectionately yours,

W. WHEWELL.

Trinity College, Cambridge,
Dec. 16, 1837.

PREFACE.

In the following Discourses, disapprobation is expressed of a work now in use in the Examinations of the University of Cambridge,—Paley's Moral Philosophy. It is with great reluctance that I thus object to a book which forms part of the University course of reading on a very important subject, without pointing out some other book which may be substituted for it with advantage. But it appeared to me that the evils which arise from the countenance thus afforded to the principles of Paley's system are so great, as to make it desirable for us to withdraw our sanction from his doctrines without further delay; although I am not at present aware of any System of Ethics, constructed on a sounder basis, which I should recommend to the adoption of the University.

Indeed it would be very difficult to find a work which might take the place of Paley's, if we were to insist upon its containing, not only

a consistent exposition of more genuine principles of morality, but the same practical sense, moderation, and acuteness, conveyed with the same striking clearness and poignancy of style. But these merits of the work, although they secure a large portion of admiration and regard to the author, even from those who disapprove of his doctrines, do not counterbalance the great faults which it possesses, when considered as a part of our University teaching. For the common fortune of books employed for such purposes is, that the logical connexion and the necessary consequences of their principles are forced upon men's minds, while their accessory excellencies and beauties lose their effect. In thus using a book, we are compelled to refer to the positive propositions which it contains, separated from the context, exhibited in various aspects, repeated even to weariness, and stripped of all the softenings in which the writer's skill had clothed them: and thus if the principles be really false, insufficient, or dangerous, these evils cannot be remedied by any accidental merits of manner or temper. This consideration renders it in the highest degree important that all works familiarly employed in University teaching should be true in their foundations, and logical in their reasonings. When

that is the case, those who are induced to study such works, even if they do so without love or zeal, acquire a permanent hold upon the genuine fundamental ideas which they contain, and are thus prepared to pursue such speculations further, when the inducement occurs. Whereas when that which is taught for solid truth is, in fact, a collection of loose notions, precarious assumptions, and illogical reasonings, the minds of students are rendered incapable of consistent thought and real knowledge on the subjects thus unhappily misrepresented. I do not think it can be doubted that the general currency which Paley's Moral Philosophy has acquired, (a currency due in no small degree to the adoption of the work by this University,) has had a very large share in producing the confusion and vacillation of thought respecting the grounds of morals, which is at present so generally prevalent in England, even among persons of cultivated minds.

The writer whom I have adduced as the principal representative of a better system than Paley's is Bishop Butler. Butler has delivered no *System* of Morals; and, (in the part of his works here referred to,) is employed mainly in the discussion of the fundamental principle of the subject. It

is on this very account that he appears to many readers an obscure and vague writer. For the shew of clearness is easily acquired by him who has to trace into its consequences a principle already admitted or assumed; but the effort by which we obtain possession of the peculiar idea involved in a new principle, is hard to communicate in a precise manner. Butler has however treated his subject in a way which will hardly fail to convey his meaning to an attentive reader; and especially to one who considers the various phrases which the author employs, as so many different modes of pointing to that peculiar idea, of an absolute law of action, which is the basis of independent morality: as for example, when he speaks of man being a law to himself;—of a difference in kind among man's principles of action as well as a difference in strength;—of an internal constitution in which conscience has a natural and rightful supremacy;—and other forms of expression.

As I have stated in the following pages, in order to fix and develope among men such a fundamental idea of a moral law, it would be requisite, in this as in other subjects, to employ their minds upon the reasonings and deductions to which this

idea may give rise;—that is, to construct a detailed system of Ethics upon this foundation. It appears to me that such an undertaking is both possible, and highly interesting: but, even if I felt myself prepared for such a task, other avocations and objects with which I am already engaged, would probably long prevent my making the attempt. I should rejoice much to see the subject taken up by some more competent person.

In the mean time, till such a system appears, we may, I conceive, find, in the study of Butler's works, much that may, to a certain provisory extent, answer our purpose. For Butler's view of the office of the various principles of action in man, and of the mode in which his moral constitution determines his duties, is very consistently and closely, though not completely, exhibited in his Sermons. The First Three Sermons, upon Human Nature, the Fifth and Sixth, upon Compassion, the Eighth and Ninth, upon Resentment, the Eleventh and Twelfth, upon the Love of our Neighbour, and the Thirteenth and Fourteenth, upon the Love of God, give a view of a large portion of this constitution, and of the resulting duties. To complete this view into a system, so

far as the conduct of an individual is concerned, the principal requisites would be a similar exposition of those propensities of our nature which regard Property and Contracts, of those affections which are the origin of Families, and of those principles which are the basis of Civil Government.

But a system of Ethics should, I conceive, do more than merely provide us with maxims for the regulation of our own conduct and feelings. It should also do, what Paley's work professes to do: it should point out the rational grounds of the good institutions which prevail in organized societies, with regard to the objects of men's desires and affections; and thus invest those institutions with the sanction of morality as well as law. Butler does not attempt any such application of his principles, and therefore his writings are very defective as an ethical system.

Still I conceive, that if the Sermons which I have mentioned were published in a convenient form, arranged so that the different parts could be easily referred to, and provided with a few illustrations of Butler's representation of the principle of human action collected from ancient and

modern authors*, they might be of great use in the absence of a more complete system. In this belief, it is my intention shortly to publish such an edition of these Sermons.

In the second of the following Sermons, a paragraph is inserted which was omitted in the delivery.

* For example, Stewart's "Classification and Analysis of our Active and Moral Powers," contained in the First Chapter of Part II. of his "Outlines of Moral Philosophy."

SERMON I.

ROMANS I. 20.

For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

THE constant object of the Christian preacher should be to lead men to love and glorify their heavenly Master, and to live suitably to their Christian profession. "Hallowed be thy name;... Thy will be done on earth," might be his standing texts, and his perpetual theme. But this unity in his end, may include a vast variety in the means which he employs. It may often be best that he should take his place by the side of the living waters, and call aloud, "Ho, every one that thirsteth!" But it may sometimes be no less proper for him, to stand by the *fountain-heads* of truth; to watch over the well from which distant streams are derived; to repair its crumbling wall; to complete its broken rim; above all, to remove carefully all pollution and impurity, all poisonous or unwholesome taint, which mistake or negligence may have shed into it. Instead of practically appealing to the great rules of duty, and the affec-

tions and motives which may urge men to obedience and love, it may at times be profitable to examine how these rules of duty are to be discovered and known by man; on what grounds they rest; how they are consistent with themselves, and with human nature. For man,—a creature born to think as well as to feel—impelled to speculate no less than to act—whose business it is to render, not a blind but a "reasonable service"—cannot restrain himself from demanding such consistency;—cannot refrain from thus enquiring after the ground of that which is enjoined him. It is the irresistible impulse of his nature, which receives a warrant in the injunction * to "*scrutinize all things, and hold fast that which is right.*"

Nor are such employments of man's understanding without influence on his life and conduct: far otherwise. Although enquiries concerning truths of doctrine may be actively prosecuted by a few only, they exert a mighty power, in a thousand ways, upon the daily thoughts and practice of the bulk of mankind. The prevalent opinions concerning the first principles of religion and morality, tinge, through innumerable channels, the remotest streams of religious and moral teaching; and thus affect the spiritual welfare of millions of our fellow-christians. Those who employ themselves in the examination of such original principles and sources of truth, may therefore feel themselves entitled to utter the prayer of the faithful servant of old, †"O Lord God, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and shew kind-

* 1 Thess. v. 21. † Gen. xxiv. 12.

ness unto my master Abraham—Behold, I stand here by the well."

We stand here by the well. We here teach those who are to teach others; we here communicate those governing principles, which in a great degree guide and shape the course of intellectual activity in after-life. What is here imparted to those who repair to our fountains, is transmitted to the whole of our nation, by the various lines of communication which belong to our civil and spiritual condition—by the channels of our domestic and social life, of our literature, and of our ecclesiastical polity. Who among us can doubt that, in this way, we exercise a vast power, for good or for evil? Men may sometimes scoff at such influences; but what serious man can fail to see, that the doctrines to which we give our sanction here, *must* sway and *have* swayed the general bent of men's reasonings and convictions upon the most important points of moral and religious truth?

It cannot then be deemed improper, if, in this and the following discourses, we endeavour to ascertain, what view of the nature of moral and Christian duty is most conformable to the true constitution and condition of man.

The limits of this opportunity do not allow us to speak of a subject like this, in a full and systematic manner; nor, if they did, would such a procedure be here desirable. A few reflexions, suggested either by the matter itself, or by the words of Scripture, may tend, we trust, to throw some light, both on the doctrines which claim our acceptance, the reasons on which they rest, and

the real value of the difficulties which may be urged against them.

With this view I have selected the portion of Scripture from which I have taken my text. In this passage, St Paul reminds the Romans, that the invisible things, or properties of God, his eternal power and Godhead, have been clearly discoverable ever since the creation, being understood by the things that are made. These expressions, taken alone, might at first appear to turn our thoughts to the visible and material creation; and to those attributes of the Creator, his omnipotence, his immensity, and his wisdom, which such a prospect suggests. And if this were the true view of the case, the admonition might well fill and elevate our minds. For whose heart does not bound within him, when he looks abroad on all the magnificence of the world in which we are placed; the variegated earth and the boundless ocean;—the daily splendour and nightly pomp of the sky;—the innumerable forms of beauty and life which unfold themselves to our gaze;—and considers all these things, as *works* that display the hand of the Almighty, and *witnesses* that tell forth his glory!

But yet, a little reflexion will show us, that something more than this was in the Apostle's mind. It was not alone the power and skill of a divine artificer, which he held to be discoverable in the constitution of the created world, but the holiness of a divine lawgiver, the justice of a divine judge. For his purpose, in the argument which the text conveys, was to show that

the pretended teachers and sages of the world, up to the time of Christianity, "were without excuse," in the degrading representations of the deity which they devised, or at least countenanced. And the monstrous and abominable character of these perversions consisted in a denial of the *goodness* and *purity* and *righteousness* of the divine nature, far more than in a mere limitation of his power and wisdom. For *this reason* it is, that the Apostle declares them inexcusable;—because, as he says in our text, the invisible attributes of God may be collected from the things that are made. He had, in the preceding verse, declared that "that which may be known of God was manifest among them, for that God had showed it unto them." But he adds (v. 21.) that "though they knew God, they did not glorify him *as* God;" and on this account he declares it was, that a penal darkness was spread upon their hearts, and they were given over to impure and vile affections. It was because, as our translators have expressed it, (v. 28.) "they *did not like* to retain God in their knowledge," that "he gave them over to a *reprobate* mind:" they did not conform their standard* of good and evil to their knowledge of God, (for so the metaphor may be rendered) and therefore God allowed them to set up in their minds a base standard, which overwhelmed them with a monstrous mass of vile and corrupt material†. "They knew," he urges (v. 32.), "the judgment of God, that they who do such things are worthy of death;" although they did not cease, not only

* οὐκ ἐδοκίμασαν. † ἀδόκιμον νοῦν.

to do the same, but to "have pleasure in them that do them;"—to acquiesce in them speculatively, and to accommodate their public professions to the worst propensities of man. And on this fault of theirs the Apostle founds his argument, that all mankind require a new means of light, and life, and salvation.

Thus it appears that St Paul, in this chapter, maintains that the heathen had the means of learning the *righteousness* of God; not only his power, but also his *Godhead;*—all those divine attributes and relations by which he is the governor and judge of the world, the enemy and condemner of moral evil. And this, the Apostle declares, may be *understood by the things that are made;*—may be learned from some part of that world which is God's workmanship.

The question then occurs, in what part of the creation do we find this manifestation of those attributes of the eternal Godhead, on which the Apostle thus argues? It cannot be in the mere world of matter, or even of irrational life. Stones and trees speak not to us of the righteousness of their Artificer. Brutes, as well as man, are wonderfully made; and show forth the wisdom and skill of Him who framed them; but they suggest nothing as to a *moral* author of the world. He has not left himself without witness of his kindness, since, as St Paul reminded the Lycaonians, he gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*; but where has he placed the testimony of his justice

* Acts xiv. 17.

and truth? where are we to find, among created things, any work which discloses to us a *holy* as well as a *wise* Creator, such as the Apostle's reasoning implies?

If we pursue our way along his argument, we have not far to seek for that which we thus require. As we advance in the next chapter, we find him telling us clearly * that the heathen, which have not the revealed law of God, have a corresponding law written on their hearts;—that they are created with a conscience which bears witness to this law;—that their thoughts accuse or excuse them in conformity with it;—and therefore it is, that he concludes (in the third chapter of this Epistle †) that all, Gentile and Jew, are under sin. They have within them a voice which accuses and condemns them. God has established in their bosoms a power which tries, judges, punishes and rewards their most secret actions. There is a world within the heart of man, which the Creator of all things has made, as well as a world without. There are in the mind internal powers, a natural bearing of parts, a fixed constitution, which are most important works of our Maker's hand, and which demand our most serious consideration.

And when we look at this internal world of impelling and regulating principles, this mental constitution of man, this law written on his heart,—are we not led to a nobler view of the creation and of the Creator, than any aspect of the mere material world can offer? It is not only true, that God rules the raging waves, and sets bounds to

* Rom. ii. 14. † Rom. iii. 9.

the ocean which it cannot pass: he has also established himself a dominion among the stormy impulses and wild affections of the human heart; and has laid down, among *them*, a boundary line which they *may* roll over, but can never obliterate. It is not only that the lions roaring for their prey seek their meat from God, and that man walks forth to his work* to earn his share of the divine bounty; but that, while the lions rush headlong to their object, without control or restraint, man has an internal monitor, which tells him that his actions are good or bad, and which can often even chain and guide the brute within the bosom. It is not only that the sunshine of God beautifies the flower, and His heaven reflects itself in the quiet lake; but even the better part of heaven finds a reflexion, though faint and dim, in a tranquil conscience; and the cheering sunshine of His approval, everywhere felt, gilds all the better impulses of our nature;—so that whatsoever is just, whatsoever is true, whatsoever is pure, whatsoever is lovely, is also *of good report* among men;—so that *if there be any virtue*, there is also an accompanying *praise*.

Surely God appears in far greater majesty when we view him as the ruler and lawgiver of the moral world, than when we contemplate the earth as his footstool and the sky as his canopy. He sits enthroned, not only among clouds and lightnings, stars and planets; but also in the wider and deeper world of thought and will, of passion and action, his government is felt, his strength and wisdom

* Psalm civ.

are seen. There, he has not only a throne but a sanctuary. He has erected a tribunal in the human heart, so that though man *may do* evil, he cannot knowingly *approve* it. On this tribunal, on this sanctuary, we may well look with admiration and reverence; and as we read the sublime lesson of a great and wise God in the wide page of the external world, we decypher, in the moral constitution of man, a testimony no less significant, and even more touching and solemn, of his holiness and righteousness, his love of good and hatred of iniquity.

This is indeed the lesson which has constantly offered itself to the minds of those, even among the heathen, who have, in seriousness and sincerity, looked at the constitution of man, and of nature, and endeavoured to raise and purify themselves by the contemplation. They have in all cases, though often without being able to render reasons which should convince more vulgar and turbid minds, advanced, not only to the persuasion of a Maker of the universe, but also of a just and righteous Master and Ruler, on whose approval the good man may rest in trust and hope. This was the conclusion, as you well know, to which the wisest and best of those were led, who reasoned and enquired before the light was sent to lighten the Gentiles. This belief, a wavering and feeble conviction no doubt, yet still the constant prompting of their better nature, dawned upon some minds, even among those Greeks who by their wisdom knew not God for any effectual purpose of salvation. The same persuasion too took

root among the reasoners of that city, to whom the Epistle now under consideration is addressed, and mingled with the injunctions of the sternest code of morality*, a soothing recognition of a divine power to which we owe all that we have of good. And what shall we say of the meditations of those who worshipped the true God? Can it have escaped the notice of any reader of the Bible, that the Jewish Psalmist, always delighted to trace the greatness and goodness of the Creator in the things which are seen, never concludes such a train of reflections without recurring to the superior beauty and majesty of God's moral attributes. Thus in that beautiful hymn, the hundred and fourth psalm, the divine poet exclaims, O Lord, how manifold are thy works:—the earth is full of thy riches;—so is the great and wide sea;—thou stretchest out the heavens like a curtain;—thou makest the clouds thy chariot, and walkest upon the wings of the wind;—thou hast planted the hills with thy forests;—thou givest food to the lions and space to the leviathan;—life and death are in thy hand. The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever;—I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live;—my meditation of him shall be sweet. But is this all? Are these songs and meditations only concerning the aspects and movements of lifeless matter;—the life and death of brute beasts? Far from it: these contemplations lead up to a more solemn thought; "Let sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul!" The

* The Stoical philosophy.

loftiest notions of God the Creator lead us on to God the Judge. We cannot rest satisfied with acknowledging the Divine Power, except we also believe it to be the awful enemy of sin and wickedness. All living things wait upon Him that He may give them their meat in due season; if He hide His face they are troubled; if he take away their breath they return to dust: and we cannot but recognise, in the Lord of life and death, the guardian of that separation of sin and holiness to which our reason points. When in our moments of inward brightness we consider Him who clothes himself with light as with a garment, we are solemnly impressed with the psalmist's persuasion that "justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne, mercy and truth go before his face*.

Once more, not to dwell on what is so plain;—all will recollect the nineteenth Psalm, in which, after the sun and the moon, day and night, the earth and the firmament, have been called upon to declare the glory of God; we are in the next verse (v. 7.) told, suddenly and abruptly, as it might appear to those who have not looked for the moral character of God in his creation;—"*The law* of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." And in order that we may have no doubt that this connexion of thought belongs to all men, St Paul bids us remember, that those who had not the law of the Jews, were a law unto themselves. They had the work of the law written in their hearts; and therefore it was that their thoughts turned not only to a power-

* Psalm lxxxix. 17.

ful, but in their better moods, to a just divinity;—not only to a hand which held the thunderbolts, but to a divine purpose which prepared punishments for the wicked, and looked with complacency on the virtuous man in the midst of his apparent adversity.

We are now, we hope, enabled to bring clearly into view the meaning of the argument in the text. Not only the eternal power, but also all the other attributes of the Godhead, have, as we have seen, been understood among men by the things which are made. But this was because, among the works of the Divine Maker, they recognized that part of human nature,—the conscience of a distinction of right and wrong,—the law written on the heart. And thus it was that His invisible but most glorious properties were clearly seen by the mental eye of His moral and religious creatures.

That the faculty which guided them to this view of their Creator, is grievously obscured and perverted in man's present condition, is too surely true. That it wants force to constrain the corrupted will and enlighten the blinded heart;—that in the wisest it requires to be unfolded and cultivated;—that in the best it stands in need of a better strength;—that the Christian must seek to assist its researches, and to supply its defects, by the study of a plainer and more powerful teaching;—that he has an inestimable privilege in the hope of obtaining from on high, aid to his obedience, and pardon to his failures;—all this we know full well. But yet man's moral faculty, though defaced and darkened, is not destroyed: though it may be

shorn of its power, it does not lose its right: even in its abasement it retains traces of its divine origin and descent: and its voice, often overborne and drowned by louder and more vehement cries, is still heard at intervals, ever speaking the language of a region which lies above the tumult and dissonance of appetite and passion.

We need not use many words to show how, from the things that are made, thus explained, the invisible things of Him, the Maker, are clearly seen;—how the holiness and justice of God are made known to us by the conscience of man which is His work, by the law of the heart which is His writing. If these portions of the constitution of man be not part of the design and purpose of the Creator, how came they into being? How came man to have a universal faculty, an unconquerable tendency, to judge of actions as right and wrong, while such endowments are denied to all creatures besides? How came man, not only to acknowledge laws as made for his own guidance, but to regard them with a profound and mysterious reverence;—to bear their impress in the depths of his thoughts;—to extend his condemnation to the will and purpose;—to proceed in his estimate of actions and intentions, far beyond the utmost demands of legality or perceived advantage? How came this, but that God has given to him, and him alone, a perception of a supreme law of rectitude in will and act? And how came man's heart to bear this indelible inscription, of such clear and weighty import, if He whose hand traced the characters had no meaning or object while he

wrote? And if the conscience of man *is* part of that work which Almighty God designed from the foundation of the world and executed with consummate care and skill, how can we imagine that the Divine thoughts are not the perfect archetype of all which conscience approves and admires? The Author of man is the author of his moral constitution, as well as of his corporeal frame; and it is impossible for us to believe, that He has stamped upon His work a contradiction of His own nature. It is impossible for us to conceive that the Creator of the world, having placed in us a faculty, which, duly developed and faithfully consulted, condemns and loathes all that is base and vile and unjust and wicked, is himself an indifferent spectator of good and bad, of vice and virtue, of pollution and purity, of the highest and the most degraded impulses of our nature. We cannot but deem otherwise than this; and when among "the things which are made" we find such a portion,—when in man himself we discern traces so divine,—we cannot but understand, with St Paul, both the infinite power and all the other godlike attributes of his Maker.

We have thus the argument of the text brought clearly into view; and we see that it rests for its force upon the great truth, that the constitution of the world and of man are such as to give no faint or doubtful indications of the holy, just and righteous character of the Creator and Governor of the universe. Thus contemplating and thus understanding, we catch some glimpses of the pure and spotless splendour of the Divine Majesty:—scanty and broken glimmerings indeed, yet such as our

nature, in this its imperfect condition, is alone capable of. We now see our Maker and Judge, as through a glass, darkly. We see but the remote beams of his radiance, the outskirts of his glory; but we believe that these scattered rays and broken reflexions proceed from a central orb of unutterable brightness. We believe that God is the author of all good; and we judge of God by what we see of good. We seek to approach Him by imagining all we can of best and holiest. We conceive our Father in heaven to be the perfection of all that *tends* to perfection in his creation; and on the wings of the best faculties which he has given us,—our purest thoughts, our highest aspirations, our most solemn judgments,—we endeavour to raise ourselves into the region which lies at the foot of his eternal throne.

Whether this shall ever be otherwise, it is not for us to say. What more intimate knowledge, what clearer vision, what closer apprehension of the attributes of God, may be vouchsafed hereafter to those that love him, we know not. In their glorified condition they may perhaps see him as he is, and no longer judge but by the reflexion of Him in His works, the world and the souls of men. They may then perhaps understand the essence of goodness, and purity and holiness; and look with adoring eyes into the sources, hidden far in the depths of the Divine nature, from which these perfections have flowed forth into His creation. When day shall cease to utter forth to day and night to night;—when the angel shall swear that there shall be time no longer;—when the

heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll;—when the world in which we live shall cease to bear testimony to God's power and wisdom and kindness;—then the world within us may also cease to be the witness of God's holiness and righteousness, justice and truth. Then, it may be, we shall no longer have to seek the kingdom of God in the soul of man, but may be able to gaze on its glories as they surround us on every side. But while we are in our present condition, we may not omit to look into our hearts and into our consciences for a distinct and significant evidence of God's nature and purposes. This we are bound to do, not only that we may adore and glorify him, but also that we may thus be able to receive and to interpret those declarations and directions, those gracious promises and pure commands, which he has given us by a more especial and merciful dispensation. It is our duty—may it be our privilege!—it is our appointed course—may it be our path of blessedness!—to find, within and without, in the book of revelation and of reason, in the original structure of our souls, as well as in the blessed provisions for their redemption and sanctification, evidence of Him, who not only "openeth his hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness," but also "is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works."*

* Psalm cxlv. 16, 17.

SERMON II.

ACTS XXIV. 16.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward man.

SOMETHING was said in a former discourse from this place, in order to show that a conscience, judging of our actions as right and wrong, is a part of our nature as it was created by Almighty God, and is a necessary foundation for our apprehension and conviction of his righteousness and holiness. That such a faculty, although it originally exists in us, requires to be enlightened and instructed, in order that it may be a safe and salutary guide, is a most important truth. But we see, from innumerable passages of Scripture, that the need, which this endowment has, of discipline and teaching, does not prevent its being constantly referred to by the Apostles, as the strongest, or rather, the only true reason for decision, in choosing our course of action. Thus St Paul, when he has occasion to lay before the magistrate the object of his conduct and the general habit of his life, does it in the words of the text: "I worship the God of my fathers... and have hope of a resurrection of the dead;—

and herein do I exercise myself, to have always *a conscience void of offence*, toward God and toward man." And supposing the conscience thus exercised and strengthened, the same Apostle refers to it habitually in his exhortations: "Ye must be subject," he tells the Romans*, "not only for wrath, but *for conscience' sake.*" He refers the Corinthians to the same authority, as the surest guide through the tangled questions concerning the application of the Jewish laws to Christians*. To them too he says, in his second Epistle†, "Our rejoicing is this, *the testimony of our conscience*, that with simplicity and godly sincerity...we have had our conversation in the world." In like manner the other Apostles also speak; as St Peter‡; "Baptism doth save us...not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but *the answer of a good conscience* toward God." On the same grounds do the sacred writers proceed in many other passages, which I need not here accumulate. And all these, I will not say prove, but manifestly harmonize with and confirm the doctrine that we possess a moral faculty within us, which is intended by our Maker to be our guide; and by which those who carefully awake and consult it, are enabled to direct themselves, in the path of truth and righteousness.

To this view, of the existence and authority of an internal faculty, fitted and entitled to pronounce upon the moral quality of actions, various objections have, as you well know, been urged by moral teachers of great name and authority.

* Rom. xiii. 5. † 2 Cor. i. 12. ‡ 1 Pet. iii. 21.

It has been said, that no such power, existing as a peculiar and separate endowment in the mind, can be discovered or established;—that the decisions of conscience may be resolved into the impressions produced upon us by the experience and expectation of pain and pleasure, into the common working of fear and hope;—that thus, the operations of conscience do not require us to assume any separate faculty of the mind from which they proceed;—that those who have supposed such a faculty have never been able to derive from this doctrine, rules of conduct of clear and universal application;—that on the contrary, different nations and different ages, all of whom must have possessed this internal guide, have entertained opinions the most diverse concerning the moral quality of the same actions; many of them holding those things to be blameless or laudable, which we condemn as utterly wicked and abominable. In such diversity of opinions, how, it has been asked, do we discern the impress of one original form of truth? In such a mixed mass of motives and reasons, how do we trace the operation of one single faculty of the soul?

Such questions may appear too remote and obscure to be treated of in the discourse of a preacher. Nor can it be denied that such enquiries into the foundation-principles of conduct and duty have their peculiar difficulties. Even when motives are exemplified in actions;—even when we have before us, in living men, the manifestations of approval and condemnation, of peace

of mind and remorse;—how hard is it to disentangle from each other the shadowy forms of passion and reason!—to resolve the internal tumult into the voices which compose it!—and to assign each part of the mental dialogue to a separate speaker! Yet when we see principles thus embodied and impersonated;—when we are thus assisted by our practical judgments and sympathies;—we *can* contemplate steadily, and often, it may be, profitably, the workings and struggles, the impelling and regulating movements, of man's heart and mind. But when we would deal with these workings in a general and separate form;—when we would ascend into the region of abstract objects of thought;—when we would speak of will and desire, reason and conscience as *things*, concerning which we have to enquire their history and boundaries and office;—we feel that it is then far more difficult to carry along with us the thoughts and convictions of hearers. But yet, among men who are called upon to examine their own minds;—who are, by their condition and destination, directed to meditation and connected thought;—such matters, even in this abstract and incorporeal form, may hope for some regard, such as in former times they have often received, in similar circumstances. And at the present day, this interest in speculative truth extends far and wide, and reaches almost to all. For, the intercourse of men with each other and with books has so shaped their mental habits, that the very words which they unconsciously utter, and the arguments which they employ on common oc-

casions, give some echo of the meditations of the most profound and acute thinkers of the past and of the present time. It cannot be unprofitable, therefore, to listen somewhat more nearly to the tones of the instrument of which we thus so often repeat the strains.

Let it not, then, be deemed too hard a saying, if we here speak of the conscience of man as a faculty distinct from the other impelling and guiding principles of his actions. But yet, while we use such language, we need not be careful to maintain that this faculty is widely and plainly distinguishable from other powers of the mind, in the same way in which one bodily sense is distinct from another;—the sight from the touch. For who shall undertake thus to parcel man's soul into separate portions? Who shall say,—Here memory ends;—Here imagination begins;—This is reason's exclusive domain? But that right and wrong are peculiar qualities, and no mere modifications of pleasure and pain;—that there is good of a higher order than mere corporeal good;—that there is a sense of duty which is not merely a transformed sense of interest;—that the conscience does not delude itself when it elevates virtue above all comparison with sensual enjoyment;—these appear to be doctrines consistent both with the soundest reason, and the plainest teaching of revelation: and it is such convictions as these which we would now strengthen and illustrate.

It is by no means needful that we should here reply at length to all the difficulties and

objections which have been pointed at. The arguments tending to show that the power in man which judges concerning right and wrong, is a peculiar and distinct endowment, as far as any obvious marks and characters can prove it to be so, have often been stated. This faculty speaks a peculiar language, associates with a peculiar class of emotions, has a peculiar growth and history in the heart of man. In all these respects, this differs from other motives of human action, with which attempts have been made to confound it. Compare conscience for example with a prudential and long-sighted love of gain or of pleasure or of power, which some point at as her nearest kindred. When we examine her aspect and manners we see in her no resemblance to this family of the human impulses. They and she may come together, but they meet without recognising each other: they do not understand each other's language; even when they co-operate, they scarcely acknowledge each other as friends and allies; and though they may travel in company, they look on each other with a constant mutual suspicion.

That men did not become aware of conscience as a peculiar power of the mind, till they had long reasoned and meditated upon actions and rules;—that they did not at first separate it from all other faculties, mark it by a name, and clearly discern its place;—may well be supposed. For with how much labour and doubt, and effort and struggle, have *all* abstract thoughts, however clear, *all* foundations of general truths, however

sure, been extricated by man from the complex mass of events and appearances which surround him. Tardily and gradually, no doubt, do the principles of moral truth emerge into view, even among the sagest and most virtuous of the heathen. But has not this been so with abstract truths of the plainest kinds? Even those portions of human knowledge to which we here turn men's eyes, as the very type and exemplar of evident and indisputable speculative truth;—the properties, I mean, of space and of number;—were not these, too, brought into view, late and slowly and partially, among the most acute and luminous intellects of the ancient world?—while, over the greater part of the earth, and during the *greater* portion of the earth's history, no clear apprehension at all of such doctrines has found place in men's minds. Yet who among us holds that therefore these doctrines are precarious? and who does not see that the faculties by which we apprehend the properties of space and number are not the less real, or the less trustworthy, because they require to be unfolded and expanded by exercise and by teaching. Even though men's moral judgments should involve principles as certain and as clear as those by means of which they compare the largeness of visible things;—even if there be, concerning right and wrong, a knowledge as distinct and independent as that which studious men have established concerning the straight and crooked forms of material objects;—it need not surprize us that such knowledge did not manifest itself in a

distinct and speculative shape, till men had made considerable progress in the speculative exercise of their intellectual powers. "Hardly", says the Wise man*, "do we guess aright at things that are upon earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us: but the things that are in heaven who hath searched out?"—Hardly, we may add, do we separate general truths from particular aspects of things in the palpable and visible objects of sense; how much more difficult must it needs be, to discover those general truths which require a calm speculative view of the busy, complex, twilight world within!

Yet in truth, in order to see whether men can separate the conscience of right and wrong from other principles of action, we have only to turn our eyes to that very country, to that very time, already spoken of, when sagacious and enquiring men first discovered those abstract truths which concern the external world. In that highly-gifted people, the foremost of mankind in the achievements of human reason, all the perversions of practice and all the blindness of the heart were not able entirely to darken the clear intellect, when it applied itself to moral speculation. And their philosophers soon separated the ideas of moral good and evil actions from notions of arbitrary command and extraneous recompense. Would we see the proof of this? Let us turn to that imaginary Polity which the great moral teacher of that day† put forth as

* Wisd. ix. 16.

† Plato.

a symbol of the relations of the various faculties of man:—and we shall there find this truth most clearly and loudly expressed. "Let us proclaim" he says* "with the voice of a herald, that he who is most virtuous and righteous is therefore the most happy man; and that the wicked and unrighteous is the most wretched;—and that this is so, although their acts remain hidden from all eyes, both of men and gods." Whether or not we assent to all the reasoning by which this declaration is preceded, it cannot but be clear that he who thus promulgates such a conclusion, endeavours to teach us, that moral good and evil are, for their own sakes alone, and without reference to ulterior regards, to be sought and to be shunned.

If we again turn our eyes to the same city a few years later, moral wisdom has removed her school from the Grove to the Porch: and we discern another sect of teachers† who insist still more earnestly upon the independent and peculiar nature of vice and virtue. These lofty and unbending moralists refused to confess that the pleasures and pains of the body, the prosperous or adverse aspect of fortune, have in them *ought* of good or evil:—an extravagant and distorted view, this, of man's condition, no doubt: but one which well shows us how broad and strong in their minds was the line which separates moral good from external advantages. We trust that we have access to a wisdom better and higher than this, and more consistent with the true purpose of God's creation.

* Repub. lib. ix. p. 580.

† The Stoics.

But if we are disposed to smile too scornfully at the paradoxes of this sect, we may recollect that one of the boldest of these—that which declares that wickedness is more contrary to our nature than pain or tortures or death;—has been adopted by one* of the greatest moral teachers of our own church, and has been by him so explained, as to be made a fundamental principle of the obligations of christian men. And thus, even in the heathen world, men came more and more clearly to see, how far virtue soars above all forms of mere pleasure; and even from them we may learn, if we ever need the lesson, the supreme reverence due to the law written on the heart.

But once more, a few generations later, let us turn our eyes to the same city. We there see, standing in the midst of Mars' hill, one invested with richer endowments and higher authority than the loftiest preeminenee in the accomplishments of reason can give. He comes to declare to them, with the teaching of more than human wisdom, that Unknown God whom they ignorantly worshipped. And in what manner does this Teacher, thus incomparably elevated above the sages of the Grove or of the Porch, speak of those earlier endeavours of man to discern the path of his duty? Does he bid his hearers to obliterate from their minds all the trains of their previous thoughts, and commence new reasonings from some principle till then unheard of? Far otherwise: he condemns their ignorant and false worship indeed; but he speaks with obvious approbation of the

* Butler, Sermons on Human Nature.

honest efforts of their philosophers, and the lofty aspirations of their poets. *God has made all nations of men, he tells them, for this very thing; that they *should* seek the Lord, if haply they might, by thus stretching forth their hands on every side, feel Him and find Him. And this was, he intimates, no wild or hopeless endeavour, "for He is not far from every one of us; in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said." And the reasoning of this Teacher implies, that from this universal Power we derive a moral as well as vital principle. For as He gives to our bodily frame the light of our eyes, the breath of our nostrils, the warm current of our hearts; so does He give to our spiritual part a power of admiring the beauty of virtue, of regulating the affections by a law, and of loving goodness and holiness, which is the very life of our souls, and without which even Christianity would have no materials for her task of the restoration of our nature.

Thus it has appeared, we trust, that the faculty which has for its especial object the relations of moral rectitude and pravity, like the other powers which acquaint us with truth, like the faculty by which we contemplate the demonstrable relations of figure and number, does not the less exist in man, because this moral power, like the intellectual ones, needs to be cultivated by exercise and patient contemplation;—requires the growth of a meditative and abstracting spirit, the effort of penetrating and comprehensive minds, in order

* Acts xvii. 27.

that it may form a system of solid doctrine, or be unfolded into a clear object of thought. It has appeared too, that during the brightest times of the activity and progress of the human faculties in the ancient world, there was a progress in the clearness of men's views concerning the office and authority of this part of their constitution; and that Christianity, when she disclosed to men motives and hopes far other than philosophy could supply, did not overturn, but sanctioned, and argued from, these views of the internal polity of man.

If we have been able to convey and establish our meaning thus far, little remains at present to be urged; for when we thus look at the matter, the objections of which we spoke melt away of themselves, and need no labour of ours to remove them. For what if the heathen did not follow out the light which they thus possessed? What if they made grievous and fatal mistakes in their attempts to form a true scheme of human action? Does this persuade us that there is no light of conscience for man's guidance? Do we therefore believe that a consistent scheme of morality, resting upon the basis of an essential distinction of right and wrong, might not have been built up, by wiser and more persevering philosophers? How can we entertain such a belief, when we look back at those other branches of knowledge to which we have already referred that we might see what is the usual course of the human mind? Do we not find that the Greeks, who with so acute and subtle a spirit seized all the elementary truths of

the science of space, entirely erred and mistook when they would have proceeded to other portions of knowledge, which now appear to us no less clear and plain. If these gifted men, knowing certain fundamental truths concerning the powers by which matter is sustained and moved, failed so strangely when they would have added somewhat more, shall we wonder that they did not, on the true basis of conscience, erect a sound code of morals? In those provinces of human knowledge where now our proudest edifices of science rise, they built a tottering wall which soon crumbled away: but what thoughtful man, on that account, doubts whether such knowledge have solid and independent foundations, which no ignorance or error can shake? The darkness and confusion of their minds does not disturb, though it might long conceal, the certainty of truth. And in like manner, if whole nations have had for ages no speculative knowledge of their own consciences, no clear apprehension of moral good as separate from command and reward; the vagueness, obscurity, and defectiveness of their thoughts can never extinguish the truth, when steadier and more penetrating minds, gifted with a clearer self-knowledge, have once brought it to light. And thus the often repeated argument against the existence of a moral faculty, drawn from vile practices and monstrous opinions of savage or corrupted man, is of no more weight, than it would be to urge, that—because rude and barbarous tribes do not know, or do not assent to, the complex and recondite truths which we here teach concerning figure and number,—

that therefore the human mind contains no faculty by which such doctrines can be independently known; and that the line of the artificer and the measuring rod of the handicraftsman are the only evidences of geometrical truth, the only instruments for its discovery.

But enough, we trust, of these reasonings;—unavoidable indeed, in order to bring the subject rightly before our view; but still, to common apprehension, abstruse, uninviting, and of doubtful edification. I gladly turn, before I conclude, to a practical application of what has been said, which offers itself to us.

As we have seen, in order that man may perceive the truths which belong to his moral nature, he must look for them. In order to judge of the true nature of human actions, he must seek a rule to which they must conform;—not a secondary rule, by which they are subservient to some other end; but a primary rule, by which they are right and wrong. In order to read the law written on the heart, he must turn his eyes within, and use such care and patience as befits one trying to decypher the record of a concealed treasure. He must habituate himself to refer to the internal guide, not only for safety, but also in order to know that there is such a guide. He must, like the Apostle, exercise himself to have a conscience void of offence; not only as the great rule of Christian practice, but also in order that, if he has need to deal speculatively with such subjects, he may, as a Christian moralist, know that he has a conscience.

This consideration well deserves our most serious attention. Too many there are, in whom perverse and vicious habits of thought and feeling have overlaid and apparently extinguished the apprehension of duty as the primary ground of conduct, of right and wrong as the most important aspects of human actions. Such persons bring upon themselves more than one punishment;—they deprave and pollute their own hearts, thus unfitting themselves for that regulation of the thought and will which God requires of his servants;—and moreover, as it concerns our present argument to observe, they impair and obscure their speculative powers of apprehending and judging of moral and spiritual truths. "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine." But if a man never try to do or to know the will of God;—if his soul be utterly immersed in selfishness or sensuality, frivolity or pride;—or even if he habitually contemplate the actions of men and the course of the world in a mode in which moral considerations are excluded;—how can he discern the operation of that deeper principle which is only visible to the eye of a moral being? How is it wonderful that man's foolish heart is darkened, if he never turns his eye towards that quarter from which the light comes? If he never attempt to discover what is the course of action which duty prescribes, how can he know whether men, or whether he himself, have a sense of duty?

There may be, for example, men who have, in their own imagination, reduced the course of

the world to a chain of inevitable consequences, of which they care only to number the links. In their view the fortunes of nations run their fated round, and the precautions of the wise and the efforts of the good are unmeaning episodes, which cannot avert or alter the catastrophe. They consider the struggles of men to shape their own course, as vain movements which an inexorable and overwhelming power beholds with a smile of tranquil irony. When men look at the world in such a spirit, they are so entirely occupied in contemplating what they conceive *must* be, that they well nigh forget to ask what *ought* to be: and even the foulest deeds, passing under their notice, call forth no indignation or blame. They can gaze on the crowds and the ages who rush to do evil, till they deem the current irresistible, and lose all other estimate of man's proper course. They have no sympathies with those who resist the stream of baneful tendencies, and battle to the last for that which is right. They can admire the prudence which conciliates the too powerful evil-doer, but they understand nothing of the spirit which calls upon men to put on their armour because they struggle against the rulers of the darkness of this world. How false and hollow is all this system we shall not here stay to point out; but we cannot omit to observe, when men have allowed such tendencies as these to assume habitual possession of their minds, how ill fitted they are to judge of moral questions. How can they, so disciplined, see in the history of man's actions a record in which the most important words are *right* and

wrong? How can they, intent on such views, fail to overlook the manifestations of man's moral nature?

Or again, consider the man who not only gives up his mind to selfish impulses, but trains and disciplines his thoughts to make selfishness the *rule*, as well as the motive of his actions;—who studies only how he may be an accomplished minister to his own pleasure and gain, and places the pride of his soul in the skill with which he balances the claims and opportunities of gratification or of worldly advancement. How shall such a man fail to blunt and obscure his perception of that fundamental moral preeminence of purity over impurity, of generous over selfish emotions, of duty over transgression, which is something far different from the self-applause of the successful voluptuary or worldling? How shall such a man, exercising himself altogether to aim at external objects by prudential rules, understand the far different principle of human conduct which the Apostle lays down, "to exercise himself always to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man."

Once more; we may look at the disappointed votary of mere enjoyment, whether mental or sensual, when he is somewhat further advanced in the career of life, and we well know in what condition we shall often find him. He has reached a state of satiety and weariness which breathes itself forth in a loathing of all human hopes and employments. Man's pursuits, he declares, lead but to objects which contain not what he sought, to

streams which slake not his thirst. All things are alike empty and vain: and when all has been tried, the business of life is over, the world is a wilderness, the crowded city a solitude, and man and all his doings are a jest;—a jest fitted to excite only a scornful and bitter smile. And thus men foster a mood of mind, utterly at variance with all moral view of human action. For all this deadly sickness of the heart, this blight and withering of the soul, is caused by this;—that men have sought in the world a scene of enjoyment, and not a field of duty. He who considers that everything which he himself and others do is marked with the all-important stamp of moral good and evil, can never see in human actions, and human concerns, a fit subject for scorn and contempt. He who knows that the enemy, sin, is constantly at the gate, ever ready to burst in upon his soul and destroy it, can never complain that he has nothing to wake and employ him. Let the fastidious slumberer listen to the rousing voice of duty. Let him up and be doing, for he has occupation enough. Let him look to the improvement of his own moral nature. Let him enquire, not if there be something which may bring a moment of pleasure to his jaded sense, or of relief to his weary languor, but something which he *ought* to do. Let him shake off the nightmare which binds his faculties in a troubled and painful dream; and find himself in a real living and moving world, where man has the path of duty to tread, and a holy and merciful God to overlook and support him. Let him do this; and

in addition to other blessed consequences, he will become aware that he has also an internal guide and judge; and will learn the meaning of that text—"Beloved, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things; but if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God."

That state of mind would indeed be blessed, in which the self-acquittal of the heart, a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man, should diffuse a clearness over the contemplative faculties also. And even our approaches to such a state partake of this blessedness. The practical student of Christian morality, constantly employed in choosing the good and rejecting the evil;—in directing himself by the voice of his conscience within, which becomes clearer and clearer as he listens to it;—can no longer doubt that he has a conscience within his breast, or that there is a moral good and evil in human actions. He endeavours to do the will of God, and receives the fulfilment of the promise that thus also he shall know.

This is the true study of morality; and though we have here been employed in considering how men may attain, or how they may fail of a comprehension of the great principles of a genuine and pure moral law; yet let us not forget, that this declaration and promise concerns us in a far closer and higher sense, than merely as pointing the way to true speculative views and well-devised systems of doctrine. "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know;" and he shall know

things which concern him far more than the construction of a code of ethics. He shall know, not merely what it behoves him to know as a teacher of others, but the things which pertain to the guidance of his own life, to the furtherance of his own salvation. He shall know, with that knowledge which resides not in the intellect but in the heart; which not merely gives him a superiority among men, but brings him nearer to God. This is the prize and happiness of him who seeks the knowledge, by doing the will, of God. He does not dissever the practical from the contemplative pursuit of holiness; and his reward is, that he at the same time gains clearness to his contemplations, and fervour to his better will. The atmosphere of his inner being is illuminated by a sunshine which gives at the same time light and warmth. If we could reach this condition, how little should we need codes and systems, reasonings and doctrines! That we do need such things, is true; for we are weak and imperfect creatures, swayed by a thousand impulses to good and evil: and it is needful for us to train all our faculties;—our mind as well as our heart;—our understanding as well as our will;—our speculative along with our practical powers, that they may aid and support each other in the purification of our nature, and in making us more zealous and faithful servants. But let us never forget that all these things;—books and sermons, principles and demonstrations, plans and systems, however true;—have this for their object. And it will be well

for us, and we shall to good purpose have looked inwards upon our conscience, and shall have given it its true practical as well as speculative office, when we can say with the Apostle*—"Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience; that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

That when all this is done, we are still debtors to God for our own souls;—that it is not the approval of our conscience, but the mercy of our Redeemer which is to be our final stay and support;—is a truth of deep and awful moment; and how closely this truth is connected with what has already been said, we trust hereafter to show. In the mean time let us bear in mind the sequel of the Apostle's exhortation to the men of Athens. Notwithstanding all that the loftiest spirits and brightest intellects of men could devise, the times of which we have spoken,—the times of philosophy and human wisdom,—the times of the study of the conscience alone,—the times of the knowledge of the moral law, without the knowledge of the dispensation of redemption,—were "times of ignorance;"—of dark and perilous ignorance. And "the time of this ignorance," says the Apostle, "God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent."

This therefore is now our great and important practical business;—to cherish the sense of our

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

own demerits, and a reliance upon a righteousness better than our own. And may He teach us so to contemplate and so to use the faculties which he has given, that they may be subservient to this end. May we so study and foster the sensibility of our conscience, the purity of our internal tribunal, the elevation of our moral nature, that we may be brought to him by a sense of our own unworthiness; and find, even in that part of our nature which appears most to exalt us, additional reasons for falling, as humbled and contrite sinners, at the footstool of his grace!

SERMON III.

JOB XXXVI. 2, 3.

Suffer me a little, and I will shew, thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.

When a doctrine bearing upon various extensive provinces of the Christian system is treated of in a series of discourses, it can hardly happen but that, while we urge the argument in one part of the subject, we seem to neglect or give too little importance to truths belonging to other portions of our belief. It may have appeared to some, that in what we have hitherto said, asserting the claims of the law of conscience as the great guide of life, and the basis of sound morality, we have not referred sufficiently to our condition as servants of God; and have overlooked that view of our duties which represents them as His commands, to which we are called upon to render an entire obedience. It may seem that we have separated our moral doctrines too much from the highest religious truths. It may be reproached to us, that in endeavouring to establish an independent code of morals, we forget or undervalue the vast privileges which

we possess, as the subjects of a revealed dispensation;—that we do not enough regard the light and hope, the certainty and support, which are offered us from above;—that we in some measure supersede the rule, which ought to supersede all others,—of guiding ourselves by the direct teaching of our only Lord and Saviour.

But again; it may perhaps be urged, not only that our moral system is too forgetful of the teaching of religion, but that, if it set up any claim of independence, it is at variance with that better system which we have received from God himself. How, it may be asked, do we reconcile, with the uniform course of the language of Scripture, the tenet that those acts alone are truly moral which are done from the prompting of conscience, and not from the prospect of reward? How shall we venture to say, that the hope of future enjoyment is an impure and unworthy motive to sway the good man's life, when we find the happiness of heaven constantly held up before the eyes of the Christian disciple, as the genuine aim and appointed encouragement of his course? How can it befit us to keep our gaze fixed upon the pale radiance of moral rectitude, when a brighter futurity, an incorruptible crown, an eternal weight of glory, is held forth as the prize to those who strive for the mastery in the Christian's warfare. And how shall we venture to suppose, that the mere horror of moral wrong, or the scourge and torture of a troubled conscience, can ever be rendered sufficient to withhold men from sin; when we know how easily conscience may be cheated, or benumb-

ed, or seared; and when the Scripture thinks it needful to awe the evil propensities of men's minds with less precarious and evanescent terrors; displaying continually before the eyes of evil-doers the great and terrible day of the Lord, the worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched? Is not the moral government of the world by means of rewards and punishments, alike consonant to the nature of man and to the declarations of God? And is not this a different view from that which represents man as gifted with such a moral faculty as has been spoken of;—a faculty containing in it the elements both of the *rule* and of the *obligation* of virtue; and distinct from the expectation of reward and the fear of punishment?

Such are the questions which may perhaps occur to the minds of some persons here; and which, at any rate, deserve to be seriously considered, in order to illustrate further the view which we have taken of the nature of Christian duty. And it is so important for us to give to these questions the true answer, that it cannot be deemed unreasonable to apply to this occasion the words of Elihu in the text;—"Suffer me a little, and I will show thee, that I have yet to speak on God's behalf;"—or rather, on behalf of the consistency of God's nature and government with the soundest principles of moral truth which man's reason can discover.

It is indeed not difficult to discover the path which leads to this point. For if we turn our attention to the religious maxims which have been referred to, and which maintain good and evil

actions to be such by divine appointment, and not by any thing in their own nature, it is not difficult to see that these maxims may easily be so stated, that few persons would accept the doctrines which they convey. If we say that actions are therefore only morally good, because they are done in obedience to the will of God;—in hope of the rewards which He can bestow, or in terror of the vengeance which He can inflict;—we by no means express the whole of the belief on such subjects, which resides in the minds of the most humbly pious men. For certainly such persons would not maintain, if the tenet were clearly brought before their understanding, that we obey our Divine Master, merely and solely as a master, without respect to his glorious moral attributes of justice and holiness. They would think it a monstrous and intolerable saying, if any one were to teach that we are to obey God out of the mere impulses of hope and fear, without love of his laws and admiration of his perfections. They would look with consternation at the supposition of an obedience such as that which the slave, untouched by affection or esteem, pays to the master who menaces or indulges him. They would pray that such obedience may be far from them. They would exclaim, that it is an obedience fit only for the reprobate spirits who believe and tremble;—an obedience such as might be rendered by misguided heathens, imagining the principle of evil to have the empire of the universe.

Thus it is certain, that even they who would most earnestly insist upon obedience to God as a

main element of morality, do not really intend, if they are compelled to unravel their thoughts, that obedience alone, irrespective of the character of that power to which it is rendered, can invest actions with a moral beauty or goodness. To do the will of God, it may be truly taught, is the sum and substance of our duties; but to complete this teaching, there must be added that other truth, that God is a heavenly Master and Lawgiver, of whom we know that He is holy, just, and true;—that all his ways are righteous and all his commandments pure. Without this fundamental persuasion of the perfect nature of God and of his laws, it would not be in our power, as reasonable creatures, to see aught of right or good, in the most exact and undeviating conformity to his will.

Thus the opinion which makes the goodness of our actions depend upon their being done in obedience to the Divine will, is consistent with itself, and in harmony with the belief of pious minds, only when we combine it with the conviction, that in God are all justice and truth, righteousness and holiness. And thus, such an opinion does not negative, but on the contrary implies, that we have already ideas of those moral perfections which we thus ascribe to our Almighty Governor. As moral creatures, we look up to him as our supreme Judge, because we look up to him also as just and pure.

Nor has the course of the thoughts of holy men, the servants of God in all times, been any other than this. "He hath appointed," St Paul

told the Athenians*, "a day in which he will judge the world." But is this all? Is this to be an arbitrary judgment, where good and evil will depend on positive command alone? — By no means; "He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world *in righteousness*." To the same effect speak the teachers under the old dispensation. "Let him that glorieth," says the prophet†, "glory in this; that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth." And this strain breathes so perpetually through all the books of the sacred Scriptures, that to accumulate passages would be but to reiterate what the memories of all Christians can at once supply.

And thus the rule which directs us to avoid all wickedness and unrighteousness for its own sake, and that which enjoins us to avoid all which God prohibits and punishes, are in the most perfect harmony and agreement. They never confuse us by their diverse injunctions; but whatever one condemns, the other also forbids. The most pure and exalted views of our duty which can be drawn from the indications of our moral faculties, are confirmed, extended, purified, by the commands of a heavenly Master; and sanctioned, strengthened, armed with irresistible weight, by the promises and threatenings of a Judge of the quick and dead. The still small voice within, and the majestic announcement of a judgment to come, ever direct us to the same path of safety, hope, and

* Acts xvii. 31. † Jer. ix. 24.

joy. There is no strife between the law of righteousness and the law of God, *because God is a righteous God.* And thus what we have to say on the behalf of the views already presented, in answer to such difficulties as have been suggested, is, like the argument of Elihu in the text, that "we ascribe righteousness to our Maker."

But we may go further. How is it that there is this constant and universal concordance between the commands of God and the precepts of the most enlightened reason? How do we come to know that our Master, Governor, and Judge, is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works? We have already, in a former discourse, attempted to explain that we are led to this conviction by the moral faculties which God has given us. Our consciences, which tell us that there is a distinction of just and unjust, of pure and impure;—our hearts, which conceive and aspire to a being of more perfect holiness than *man's* ways and works can realize;—prepare and urge us to ascribe to the Creator of the world, to the Maker of us and of our faculties, all moral perfection. They compel us to look upon Him as the Guardian of the moral law, no less than the Upholder of the physical laws of nature. We believe that he will make the law of right the actual rule of the moral world, because we cannot conceive it possible, that such a law should *exist*, and should *nevertheless* be crushed in pieces and trampled under foot by the wild and unclean passions of man. Our belief that God will punish the disobedient and evil-doer, is closely intertwined

with, or rather is identical with, our belief that the disobedient *ever is* the evil-doer. And that evil shall not be the permanent and final law of the universe, our reason earnestly persuades us, even before the voice of heaven confirms her anticipations. And thus the thoughts by which we are led to the conviction of a Judge of the world, executing vengeance on those who violate his commands, spring from the same point with those thoughts which exhibit to us the moral law of our nature as the sole guide of our will, the only rightful authority which can govern the world. The opposition which was suggested between virtue as obedience to God, and virtue as conformity to the rule of conscience, vanishes as we examine it. For the power of God which surrounds us corresponds to the moral power which is within us. The moral law written upon the heart is God's writing. Conscience is the reflexion of Divine holiness in man, and Command is the expression of the same holiness as it exists in God. There can therefore be no discord between the spirit of obedience to the divine commands, and the spirit of conformity to the dictates of the enlightened and instructed conscience. If we pursue these guiding clues to their remote origin, they are formed of one common thread. When we illuminate the depths of our minds, we see that the two separate lines, as they at the surface appeared, run together and coincide. And thus if, like Elihu, we "fetch our knowledge *from afar*, and ascribe righteousness to our Maker," the difficulties to which we referred vanish, and the

opposition disappears which might be alleged to exist between the truths of religion and the views which we have presented of morality.

That a righteous God must govern the world by rewards and punishments, our reason assures us, with a conviction that well prepares us for the clear declaration of God's word. And when we are told of the penal tribulation and anguish which await the wicked in a future condition;—when we are told that they, by their impenitence and hardness of heart treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;—are we told aught which is at variance with our doctrine, that the actions of the good proceed from the love of goodness, and that fear alone cannot make man perfect in heart? Surely there is here no discrepancy. It is precisely because such men are not good, that these forms of terror are displayed to their souls. It is because they are incapable of acting from a motive of pure morality, that God has appointed that they shall thus be urged by such motives as their minds can feel. It is because they have not in them the living and moving principle of right action, that they must thus be carried along by the stress of external force. Their hearts are diseased and perverted;—sunk down from the region of pure moral feeling; and therefore the impulses by which they are to be acted upon, are, by the Divine government, accommodated to their distorted and degraded condition. And when the righteous are encouraged in their advance by the hope of rewards, are not

these rewards always held forth as such which righteous souls alone can relish? What Christian heart does not assent to those who tell us that heaven would be no heaven for us, except we should there have heavenly dispositions. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This is their prize; — the very satisfaction, in eternal fulness, of that purified nature which impels them to obedience and rectitude in this their mortal pilgrimage.

But may we not now venture onwards; and on plainer and more pleasant ground? The call which summons us to obey the divine commands is, as we have seen, only the echo of the voice in our own bosoms, which assures us that all his commands are holy, just, and true. The denunciations of his wrath which stand between us and all wickedness, only drive us back from that which we know to be, in its own nature, vile and polluted. Here then the feelings of our hearts go along with the commands of our Governor. He exhorts us to nothing but what is in itself bright and lovely, the genuine object of all our purest and noblest affections: he withholds us from nothing but that which is of itself pernicious and foul; that which to our clearer vision is hideous, loathsome, and painful. Can we then look with terror and awe only upon the inducements and warnings by which we are led to choose what our own hearts approve and delight in? Is the service of God a service of force and fear alone? Or is it not rather far otherwise? Shall we not be led to forget the terrors of the law in our

contemplation of its beauties? Will not our hearts run on before our hopes and fears? Will not our labour become a labour of love?—and our service of God become a service, not of a rigid and terrible rule, but of a good and perfect Master, whose thoughts only anticipate ours, in the promotion of all that we admire and love, as most fair and excellent;—whom we obey, not for fear, but through that perfect love which casteth out fear?

We would fain answer *yea* to these enquiries. But when we endeavour to frame our lips to such a reply, our hearts misgive us:—our recollections of the imperfections and inconsistencies of our nature, of the wayward and perverse course of our affections, rise upon us; and we do not dare to claim for ourselves this state of our thoughts, though this alone we see to be sound and consistent with our moral nature. We dare not say that we thus love the Lord our God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength. And we are thus checked and frustrated when we attempt to build up, upon the foundation of the moral faculties, a structure which is in harmony with the other portions of man's constitution,—with his place in the universe,—and his relation to his Divine Master. We cannot divest the law of its terrors, we cannot bring man into conformity with the rule of his own nature. We cannot make of the world a temple of God, in which man shall worship him with a perfect heart.

On the contrary, in spite of the light within, man's will goes astray; his passions delude him;

even his conscience becomes darkened. He has another law in his members, warring against the law in his mind;—powers which rebel against their rightful sovereign and bring her into captivity. The law is spiritual but he is carnal. That which he does he allows not; that which he would he does not; he does that which his better nature hates. He consents unto the law that it is good; but how to perform that which is good he finds not; when he would do good evil is present with him. Well may he exclaim, with him whose expressions* we have adopted, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Here indeed is a question to which our human reason can return no certain and satisfactory reply. Faint and hesitating, broken and incomplete, are the words which *she* utters, when she is asked for a deliverer. She turns for an instant to philosophy; but before she has dared to point steadily to *her* as the powerful rescue from our thraldom, she drops her hand: for she recollects how little the wisdom of man has been able to effect in healing the corruptions of man's will, and enlightening the blindness of his practical understanding. She knows that the stern self-confidence of the Stoic and the lofty aspirations of the school of Plato, essayed in vain for long ages, to purify the lives of men, and to bring their affections into conformity with the spiritual law of their nature. She is smitten with the conviction that *they* cannot deliver man. They illuminate his chains: they

* Rom. vii.

give light enough to shew the walls of his dungeon; but they have no power to snap the fetters, or to roll back the prison doors upon their hinges.

Still therefore the plaintive cry must arise, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But are we left without an answer? Well you know that it is not so: for your gladdened ears and grateful memories well recollect, that he who asks this question also answers it. Who shall deliver me? I thank my God, He shall deliver me, through Jesus Christ our Lord. He it is who can bring to us life and liberty;—who can raise our affections to the standard of the holy law of God;—who can put our moral being at one with itself: who can resolve the long and weary contest between flesh and spirit, by which our existence is harassed and distracted, into a state of love and hope, peace and joy.

But *how* can this be? How can God thus shew his abundant grace and favour upon creatures so alienated from good, so weak and wicked, so perverse and unclean, as man is? We began by asserting the supreme authority and dignity of the moral law: but is not this authority renounced, is not this dignity slighted, if sin and transgression are admitted to favour;—if they are not only passed over, but remedied;—if man is not only pardoned, but promoted;—if the offence not only do not lead to destruction, but be the occasion of sanctification. Where is the fundamental and essential force of the moral law, if our nature, though it deviates by enormous errors

from this its primary constitution, is nevertheless placed in a condition of progress towards purity and perfection? If these blessings be thus gratuitously showered upon sinful man, what else can we say, than that the moral law is abrogated; the authority which we have ascribed to the distinction of right and wrong is annihilated; and the great truths which we have proclaimed,—the responsibility of man and the righteousness of God,—vanish away. If God strike off our fetters, and rend asunder the walls of our prison, does he not at the same time tear up the scroll on which the law is written, and efface the just but terrible inscription that he who doeth not these things shall die?

To these questions our philosophy supplies no answer. Out of this difficulty human reason discovers no escape. To make the next advance in our acquaintance with our true condition, we need to fetch our knowledge not only from *afar*, but from *above*. Our steps from this point must be guided by a light from heaven.

And, opening our minds to the instruction thus vouchsafed to us, we learn that wonderful dispensation by which God is just, and yet the justifier of them that believe. We learn that in Jesus Christ there is deliverance, because there is redemption and propitiation;—that* "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did;" that† "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, he condemned sin for its sinfulness, that thus the righteousness of

* Rom. iii. 24. † Rom. viii. 3.

the law might be fulfilled in us." This great mystery, that* "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself,"—this, and this alone gives us such a view of our condition, as can at once satisfy the judgment of our reason and the aspirations of our hopes. This alone answers alike to the awful voice of conscience, and the vehement cravings of our hearts. This alone preserves inviolate the majesty of the divine law, while it allows us to look for pardon and support;—yea, even for peace and blessedness. The knot which appeared so inextricable is untied: the questions which seemed unanswerable have received ample, full, and sufficient answer. And, as in the riddle of old, out of the strong comes forth sweetness;—out of the severity of the law, and the inflexible rigour of its requirements, comes forth the great manifestation of the divine love, and the inestimable privilege of man.

Is there then any discord or contrariety between the principles which we have endeavoured to explain, as to the origin of moral distinctions, and the great doctrines of the religion of Jesus Christ? Is there not rather the most entire accordance and harmony? The view of our condition given us by the revelation of God, confirms and enforces the representations of our natural reason; while it adds truths of vast moment, of which reason could never have opened a glimpse; and dissolves overwhelming difficulties under the weight of which reason must have sunk. All that is gathered by the operation

* 2 Cor. v. 19.

of our natural faculties;—our persuasion that vice is a violation of the constitution of our nature:—that God is just and holy;—that to obey him and look for his favour, is the true purpose of our being;—all this his revealed word tells us more clearly and loudly than his voice within had told it us before. These doctrines are repeated to us from heaven, in far more solemn and emphatic terms than those which earth could utter. The mutterings and moanings of conscience were but the boding sounds which preceded the thunder of God's condemnation and the storm of his vengeance. The fatal and monstrous nature of sin is shown by no less a catastrophe than this; that it rends asunder, for a time, the divine constitution of the universe. The holiness of God is written in characters of flame, which stand forth amid the darkness of the crucifixion: and man learns, that the whole period of the existence of his race upon earth, is but just sufficient for the unfolding of a dispensation which may bring him back from the gates of hell to the footstool of the throne of grace.

But, blessed be God, this is not all. We have already seen that though our moral nature and conduct are then only in their due course when a perfect obedience springs from love and not from fear, yet that our heart and will, frail and corrupt, are too weak and perverse for such obedience, too cold and impure for such love. But even for this the divine dispensation has a remedy. Although, before a God of righteous-

ness unmixed with mercy, man's fears might extinguish his love, and the bitterness of his accusing conscience poison the current of his moral being; with man, redeemed by the divine appointment and upheld by the divine favour, it is no longer so. We owe to our Governor and Judge our rescue, our safety, ourselves. How then shall we fail to love him who first loved us*, and sent his Son to be the propitiation of our sins? We have abundant reason to feel towards our Heavenly Parent and Saviour the regard of obedient and affectionate children. Nor is the cold, dark and dense atmosphere of man's evil disposition allowed to quench this sacred flame: for we receive the spirit of adoption by which we cry Abba, Father! And thus, from the condition of subjects of a rigid and inexorable law, in which our moral constitution places us;—from the state of convicted and hopeless transgressors in which our perverse will and corrupt hearts have plunged us;—from the state of slaves of evil and outcasts of good;—we have power given us to become the children of God; "and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified with him.†"

O that we might use this power!—that we might so foster in us the working of conscience and the knowledge of a judgment to come, as both to hate and to fear every form of sin;—that we might so acquaint ourselves with God's provision for the deliverance and redemption of

* 1 John iv. 10. † Rom. viii. 17.

man as to have our share in its mercies;—and that we might so experience his sanctifying grace, that our hearts may be in harmony with his law, our hopes fixed in such a heaven as he has promised, and our souls filled with such affections as are meet for his children.

This may God grant.

SERMON IV.

ROMANS VI. 12, 13.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

We trust that in the preceding discourses delivered from this place, we have brought into your view various truths which are far from being unimportant to the thoughtful Christian. It has appeared to you, we venture to hope, that moral good and evil are original and peculiar qualities of human actions, not deriving their import from any extraneous and inferior source;—that man has a conscience—a faculty by which he judges of the moral character of his own deeds and those of others;—that his nature thus compelling him to refer to a law of rectitude and purity, he is irresistibly led onwards to believe his Maker to be a God infinitely righteous and holy;—that our recognition of the supreme authority of conscience within, is so far from being inconsistent with our obedience to God above, that these two

habits of the soul are closely connected in their origin, and strongly confirm each other;—that the hope of the favour of God, who is holy, just, and pure, is so far from being inconsistent with the love of goodness for its own sake, that the two affections, as we advance in our moral and Christian condition, tend to coalesce, and finally flow on together in one bright and glowing stream. It has appeared also, in the course of the considerations by which we have endeavoured to illustrate these doctrines, that the difficulties which have been alleged respecting man's knowledge of good and evil, arising from the various degrees and modes in which this knowledge is unfolded among men, do not afford the smallest reason for asserting that man has no natural faculty whose office is to supply such knowledge.

But we have further declared—that though man may thus learn to know the path of duty, his active powers are so marred and perverted, that he strives in vain to keep the right way by his natural strength, and must throw himself upon his Divine Ruler for guidance and help;—that all this could not avail to save him from destruction, if God did not pardon as well as direct and strengthen him;—that thus the forgiveness of sins, brought about by the suffering of Christ in the flesh, shows with new force the inviolability of the moral law; and the sustaining and sanctifying grace of God, given to those whom He has redeemed and restored, brings back such a concord between the law of conscience and the affections and desires of the heart, as can alone fill up

the harmony which the ear of our moral being demands, in the constitution of the universe.

We trust then that we may proceed a little onwards, carrying with us the conviction that the doctrines we have thus proclaimed, are no less consistent with the word of God, than with the constitution of man. We hold what is in the most perfect unison with the Christian's grounds of action, when we maintain of moral good and evil, that it is good and evil in its own essence;—that its obligation does not consist in its offering the bribe of pleasure or gain;—that its authority is not derived from its conducting us to other and independent fountains of happiness. The hope of such good as our lower nature seeks, may be on the side of virtue; but virtue is still different from the hope of *mere* enjoyment, for ourselves, or even for others. She has her own bright and lofty goal; and it is not for her to aim at the prizes of desire or appetite.

But in order to see yet more clearly the differences which exist between the doctrines which we thus oppose to each other, let us look at the matter in another aspect. Though virtue does not pursue, she produces enjoyment. She finds, even though she seeks not. She has her own pleasures; and she *alone*, so far as human ken can discover, diffuses real and permanent happiness among the sons of men. Righteousness has indeed her own joy, with which a stranger intermeddleth not. Even in the common condition of men's minds, they all feel that the conviction of deserving well, the indulgence of affection conscious of its own

purity, the glow of generous and noble pursuits, supply a happiness of a kind and order altogether different from the gross sweetness of gratified appetite, vanity, or revenge. Even the popular moralist can tell us, that one self-approving hour outweights whole years of the admiration and applause of men. But as a man's inward culture proceeds, this perception of the infinite superiority of moral good over the good of sense or passion, is made clearer and stronger: his sensibility to the moral pleasures, to the love of virtue, to the beauty of holiness, becomes keener and more delicate. A larger portion of his happiness is made habitually to depend upon the peace and joy which ever grow by the paths of duty. And in the end, he who has really become spiritually minded, can truly exclaim, that there is nothing on earth which he desires in comparison of the approval of his own heart, instructed and enlightened by the methods which God has appointed. Like the apostle, his rejoicing is this—the testimony of his conscience.

When we declare such doctrines, we cannot doubt that we are inculcating truths conformable to that moral nature which man originally received from his Maker; and to those instructions and promises which have since been most graciously vouchsafed to him. And this being so, how could we, with a satisfied mind, take any other groundwork than this, for any portion of our teaching. If this be the true foundation of Christian morals, we could not fail to look back upon our conduct with regret, if we had ever led men to tenets the contrary of these;—if we had proclaimed to them

that right and wrong are not to be pursued and avoided for their own sakes, but for collateral advantages which they bring. How could we escape the conviction of having diffused errors tending to darken and narrow men's minds—perhaps to pervert and debase their hearts—if we had so far stopped our ears to the whisperings of our better part, as to declare that virtue was merely the pursuit of enjoyment* rightly understood; or again, if we had so far forgotten the difference of self approval and of sensual gratification, as to assert, that all enjoyments, those of the body and those of the soul, differ from each other, not in kind, but only as some are more and some are less vivid, some continued for a shorter and some for a larger time*. To have given currency and influence to either of these two maxims of a false, poor, and debased view of human action, might fill us with deep and sad compunction; for what more pernicious and deplorable error can there be, than to employ the position of moral and Christian teachers in order to depress instead of elevating men's views of duty;—to sink the morality of our schools below the judgments which the common feelings of mankind sanction; instead of setting up in the midst of men a standard truly pure and elevated, such as may reprove, and in the end may reform and raise, the loose and shallow opinions with which the world can content itself. To teach either of these things;—either that virtue is the pursuit of pleasure, or that all pleasures, according to their amount, alike deserve our attention,—would

* Paley's Moral Philosophy, Chap. vi and vii.

indeed be to delude our hearers and to forget ourselves. But what if we should have insisted at the same time on both these maxims? How then should we judge ourselves? This would surely seem, as if we had exercised a perverse and obstinate ingenuity, in order that morality might have no escape from the debasing influence of our system. Neither of the two tenets alone would fully secure this noxious effect. For we might maintain that our duty is the pursuit of pleasure indeed; but we might add, that the pleasures of an approving conscience, the delights of virtue, the gratification of man's nobler tendencies, and the satisfaction of his immortal part, are in no way to be compared for a moment with the indulgence of our senses and desires;—that these being pleasures of entirely diverse kinds, we can never have to poise them against each other, or to weigh the claims of conscience and of appetite in a common balance; and thus we should escape, not indeed error, but polluting and degrading error. Or we might hold that pleasures do indeed differ only as they are more or less lasting, more or less sweet; but that man has for his guide another form than pleasure; and following this better leader, we might bid him turn with steady resolve into the path of duty, and thus escape the mire of the sensual school. But when we combine the two errors, we have no such escape. We bind ourselves to evil as it were with a manifold cord. We oblige ourselves to follow a blind leader, and we refuse to let him use his best skill. We speak of man's natural desires worse than they deserve, and yet

will not have any other master. We not only refuse to listen to our better angel, but drive him from us with mocks and insults. We plunge willingly into the slough of selfishness, and refuse to pass onwards; trusting to some vain alchemy which may convert it into a cleansing fountain.

These reproaches we might address to ourselves if we had taught such doctrines as I have described. Yet when, having so taught, we have afterwards amended our course;—have cast aside our errors and betaken ourselves to better thoughts and purer sources; and have put forth among our hearers principles more consonant to man's real nature, and to the genuine truths of religion;—we may then feel our self-reproaches mitigated by the consciousness of having done what we could, to repair our wrong. We may look upon the present and the future with satisfaction and hope; persuaded that our doctrine is such as may lead to make men truly wise and good; and therefore fully resolved to employ our best energies in impressing it on the minds of those who draw near to us; and believing that thus we may best exert that influence which is entrusted to us, for the improvement of man and the glory of God.

Whether this time be yet come, we here enquire not; far less shall we pursue what has been said, in a spirit of censure or controversy. We rather leave to men's own thoughts such questions and their answers, along with the reflections and resolves to which these may lead.

Of this we are sure, that this our nursing mother, to the furtherance of whose salutary and

elevating influences, all we here, in our various stations, are called upon to lend such faculties as we have, will never, in reality and effect, diffuse and impress upon her children any convictions which tarnish the purity or lower the standard of Christian duty. It is her office, it is her character, to be truly wise;—the guardian of solid and stable principles, the assertor of the pure and lofty doctrines of genuine morality and true religion, even if they were exiled from all the world beside. And of most of those who repair to our fountains, we believe the disposition to be such, that we should strive in vain, if it were possible that we really should strive, to imbue them with the conviction, that they can have no motive higher than the prospect of enjoyment,—no impulse more spiritual than the preponderating weight of interest. All the most earnest and thoughtful of our hearers;—all who have sought to cleanse and raise their souls by communion with themselves and with the wisest and most religious spirits of all ages, would reject from their minds such teaching; and would seek for themselves a better and more congenial wisdom. And we should utter in vain, to incredulous ears, to hearts barred against our approaches, the lessons of a philosophy which should be in dignity, in purity, and in true morality, beneath the teaching of the heathen schools.

In truth, we have, in this place, ever held in the highest reverence the men who inculcated those very principles concerning man's nature and duty which have now been expounded. What name of these later times do we honour more or more justly

than that of him who has shewn how the questionings of men, concerning the providential and the Christian dispensation of God's mercies, are answered by attention to the *Analogy* of his natural government of the world. Do we not also acknowledge him as a great teacher of morals? And do we not, along with all the most thoughtful men who give their minds to such contemplations, look with admiration upon the light which he shed on the path of moral enquiry? Yet he does not teach that there is no principle of human action but the love of pleasure, and that all pleasures have an equal right to our notice:—he does not declare that he is resolved to pass over all that concerns "the dignity and capacity of our nature, the superiority of the soul to the body, of the rational to the animal part of our constitution*." On the contrary, this better teacher calls upon man to discern and remember that there *is* a higher and nobler part of his nature;—that his principles of action *do* differ in right and office;—that appetite stands rightfully beneath prudence, and that both are under the authority of conscience†. When therefore we endeavour to uphold such principles as have been here delivered, we maintain no new doctrines. We do but go back to the consistent philosophy of the earlier time; rejecting the unhappy devices of that later period when the attempt was made to obtain the assent of the world to rules of morality, by depriving them of their moral signification.

* Paley's Moral Philosophy, Chap. vi.

† Butler's Sermons.

But supposing the great fundamental doctrines of morality on which we have insisted to be assented to, how, it may be asked, do we build upon them our superstructure? In this as in other cases, in the study of the world of conscience and duty, as well as of the world of external nature, the ideas and principles which contain the essence of the truth, are to be impressed upon men's minds and brought clearly before their apprehension by being unfolded into a connected system of reasonings and conclusions. Moreover, such a code of human action is requisite for the guidance of mankind, on whatever basis of duty we take our stand. For even if we erect conscience into man's supreme guide, she yet must guide him by becoming a source of general rules. The mind must be furnished with a body of maxims and decisions, which shall protect her against the temptations and delusions of special cases. To abandon men's conduct to the direction of their momentary conviction, governed by no condition of consistency and reason, would be a procedure fraught with intolerable dangers. We must then deduce, from the original notion of duty, all the duties and obligations of men in their various positions and circumstances? Now how is this to be done? How does the existence of an independent moral faculty, supposing it established, aid us in framing a plan of action which shall guide and inform mankind in general?

It is agreed that we must have a system of rules; but can the moral power within us unfold itself into a system of rules? Conscience is a

mighty name, but who shall read on her tablets a code of laws which all can follow?

Fully to answer these enquiries, it would be needful to deliver a system of ethics, founded on such principles as have been here asserted;—an undertaking in no way fitted for this occasion. But a very few words may serve to shew that the views which have been given of the nature of moral obligation, and of the constitution of man, by the wise and good teachers whom we have followed, lead, in a direct and manifest manner, to such a system of our duties, as may well take the place of the precarious and unsatifactory calculations of mere expediency.

For, what is the leading principle of the doctrines which we have endeavoured to expound?—Not only that man has a conscience, but that there belongs to this conscience a supremacy among all his principles of action. Not only that in addition to his other motives, he has a moral faculty, but that this faculty moves and has intercourse among the others, not as an equal, but as their sole and rightful sovereign. Man has appetites, desires, foresight; but all these are given but as the servants of conscience. It is for her to command, for them to obey. They have, in truth, over man's moral being, no independent authority; no legitimate power which they do not derive from her. They are there as her ministers. It is by wielding and controlling the impulses of sense, and passion, and interest, that she discharges her office of directing and governing, and deciding upon his conduct. The authority which we have claimed for man's moral

faculty requires this;—that all his other faculties of body and soul, are to be subservient and instrumental to the working of that master principle.

And thus our assertion of the supremacy of conscience leads at once to this maxim;—that all the other powers and impulses;—the appetites, desires, affections, pursuits, are to be directed by such decisions and rules that they may best exercise and embody the sense of duty. To procure gratification is not the primary purpose of these elements in man's moral being. Man's desires do indeed aim at pleasures;—his affections have their own sweetness;—for if this were not so, they could not be the springs of a constant and earnest activity. But such impelling motives alone, hardly separate man from the brutes. It is in subjecting these impulses to a higher end;—in making this activity the manifestation of a moral will;—in bringing the sweetest affections of the heart into conformity with the law which it contains;—it is in this way that man fulfils the intention of his Maker. And when we seek canons which may direct his self-judgment, and determine the relations of conduct and society, this is the original rule, out of which all others must be shaped;—that all those objects and interests, towards which the affections and exertions of men turn and tend, shall be subjected to such regulation,—established by the good man for himself, by society for all,—that they may promote the predominance of moral restraint over sense, passion, and selfishness, and thus contribute to purify and elevate man's nature.

And is this the conclusion of human morality only, or is it also the doctrine which we receive by divine instruction? On what other grounds do the Christian teachers urge upon their disciples the regulation of their actions? Let us listen to the Apostle in the text—"Let not *sin* reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey *it* in the lusts thereof; neither yield you your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as *instruments of righteousness* unto God." That the word "members," here and in other places, includes the faculties of the mind, as well as the endowments of the body, is easily seen;—as the same Apostle says in another place*;—"Mortify your members which are upon the earth;" among which he enumerates "inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness." And these members, our affections, and desires, the text enjoins us to devote as instruments of righteousness, not to use as instruments of sin. Let not sin, he says, reign in your mortal body. She is not your legitimate governor. You have another ruler who justly claims the best devotion of all your powers, the service of all your thoughts;—the law of righteousness. To this sovereign you are bound;—to her your allegiance is due. You have to do her commands, to further her purposes; and you then only act in accordance with your position, when all your endowments and faculties, your motives and aims, are the

* Col. iii. 5.

subjects of her government, the ministers of her work, the instruments of her operations.

The injunction of the Christian moralist, then, is,—Let not sin, but righteousness, *reign* in your mortal body. If such a one were to represent to us the constitution of the soul which lives under this legitimate sway, we should see an image of a far fairer Polity, than that in which the moralist of ancient times embodied his ideas of man's faculties and their true government. Around the throne on which Conscience is seated, would be gathered all that warms the heart of man or stirs his mind; all powers and purposes, desire and will, and thought and fancy, all waiting her commands, and zealous only to do her bidding. Far different would be this true picture from that other fiction of the tyranny of a False Reason, in which such Powers of man's mind as carry him beyond the daily realities of life are blindly banished; and in which the Domestic Affections are ruthlessly exterminated. Some resemblances indeed there might be. Desire and Appetite would still be to the ruling Faculty as servants and labourers*; and the sharper feelings of our nature, Resentment and Indignation, strenuous Energy and burning Zeal, should still be the soldiers of Righteousness, prompt and strong to guard her purity, and to repel the intrusion of evil; and in time of need, the unshrinking executioners of her just sentence. But there, too, should be all the more aspiring and mysterious Faculties of the soul; songs worthy of Sion, and colours and

* See Plato's Republic, lib. iv.

forms which the purified Fancy had gathered from the unseen, but hoped for heaven, should fill the presence chamber; and all the Charities of life, all the Feelings that convert duty and purity into happiness and delight, should be there too, as ministering angels, shedding blessings on those whom their Sovereign delighted to honour.

Such is not too bold a representation of what man would become, were he to yield his members of body and soul as instruments unto righteousness: and such is the condition to which he is taught to aspire, by the doctrines which have been here put forth. But yet, it will not fail to occur to you, that something is here wanting to complete the Christian view of man's condition. And especially after the reflections to which we were led in the last discourse from this place, on the insufficiency of the moral law to put man's being at one with itself, we shall be ready to expect some Divine provision, by which the image we have presented, instead of being as, if left to himself, man might deem it, a remote vision, fit only for the speculative mind to gaze at, shall be brought near to us, and become the object of our practical efforts and rational hopes. Nor have we far to look for this part of the great dispensation of God. We find it in the passage before us, as in a thousand other places of his word. We find there, that it is not to man in his ordinary and native state, that the exhortation is addressed;—to yield his members as instruments of righteousness. The injunction is connected with a supposition of a great change

wrought in him;—a change illustrated by the greatest which can be thought of in his natural frame;—a change equivalent to the transition from death to life. "Yield your members as instruments of righteousness to God," and "yield yourselves unto God *as those that are alive from the dead.*" Nor is this strong expression a transcient image merely. The Apostle's argument, here and in other places, is founded on this change. and the Divine Author and Type of this change, and the need there is that it should take place in us, are his constant and dominant themes. Our baptism into Christ, our natural alienation from God, our reconciliation to him by his Son;—these are the great topics on which he has been insisting, in the previous part of this Epistle. The necessity of righteousness, in a creature under such a dispensation, is to him evident; and therefore evident, because this great change has gone before. "We are buried with him by baptism into death*;" and *hence* it is that, "like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of God the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."—"So many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death;"—and "*so*† we are to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through him." Man is to be "a new creature‡:" and *thus* it is that the Christian is able to look at the law of holiness as something which is made for him, though so far beyond the natural creature's reach. His vision is strengthened, his limbs are nerved,

* Rom. vi. 4. † Rom. vi. 11. ‡ Gal. vi. 15.

his blemishes are covered, so as to fit him to follow his Master's steps. *Thus* aided, he dares to look where his great Judge points. The aspect of the law of nature, like that of the law of Sinai, was full of dread; so that men could not steadily gaze thereon. And the prophets and teachers of old, the denouncers of God's wrath against unrighteousness, had, like Moses, a fearful splendour in their faces, which the eye of man could not bear. But the Christian can live under this brightness, not by having a veil placed between him and the pure light of the law, (for how can God delight in darkness, or his servants profit by ignorance?) but by being admitted to a higher scene. He ascends the mount of transfiguration, where the terrible blaze is exchanged for a milder radiance;—where the lawgiver and the prophet are subordinate to the Redeemer;—where a voice comes out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him;"—and then he can say, awe-stricken, but not repelled, "it is good for me to be here."

But this is not all. Not only does God work a great change in those who become his servants, so that they are prepared for an obedience of the heart which, without such a change, could not exist; but also after this change, he imparts to them such dispositions and powers as a service of love requires; and thus alone are they able to bring their thought and will into harmony with the law of righteousness. "I will take away the heart of stone," was his promise by the prophet*, "and give you a heart of flesh." The former

* Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

change is not enough: the latter also is needful to complete it. And accordingly he adds, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." This was his promise under the old dispensation; well instructing us of that which we need deeply to feel, that without such a gift from above, we cannot walk in his statutes and keep his judgments. But the new dispensation tells us far more emphatically and clearly concerning the effects of the Spirit which God thus puts within the hearts of his servants. Its power is to lead them to be the servants of the law, by making them much more. It is not only that their members are to be the instruments of righteousness, but they themselves are members of Christ, and therefore not to be polluted with unholy deeds. It is not only that they are subjects of the Moral Faculty, but they are temples of the living God. God imparts to them some portion of his own nature, by means of which alone, their attempts at obedience become pleasing to him. "They that are in the flesh," says the Apostle*, "cannot please God: but ye," his adopted children, "are not in the flesh, if so be the Spirit of God dwell in you."

And thus the moral law is our schoolmaster to bring us to God, our Judge, to Christ, our Redeemer, and to the Holy Spirit, our constant guide and support. That perfect obedience which the law demands, but demands in vain, leads us to lean upon the satisfaction of the Cross. And

* Rom. viii. 8.

that subordination of all the lusts of the flesh and of the soul to the awakened and enlightened conscience, which is the only consistent interpretation of the law, makes it needful for us to ask the aid of that Spirit, whose fruits are* "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance."

But we must hasten to conclude an exposition which must be far too brief and imperfect for the subject to which it refers. Yet it has, we trust, appeared, that we have within us principles by which we are directed, not only to "do good unto all," but also† to "present our bodies and souls a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." It has been seen that, even according to the light of our natural conscience, this alone is our "reasonable service." But if nature afford light to show, she does not supply strength to pursue this upward road. We must, as our teacher further tells us, "be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable will of God." And when all our faculties and powers are thus exalted and purified by the Divine communion, then also we may well believe, that our Conscience, enlightened and invigorated by the indwelling of his favour, will teach us—not to offer an account to our Master of distant calculations of extraneous good, at which we have aimed,—but to give to him all our affections and thoughts, our hearts and ourselves.

But above and beyond all other offices of Conscience, remaining when all else is done, and

* Gal. v. 22, 23. † Rom. xii. 1.

beginning when all else is ended, will be her task, of reminding us how little is our all, how scanty our abundance, how empty the fulness of our obedience. It will be her office, as long as our service of our Master continues, to cry out to us that we are unprofitable servants, that we have done far less than it was our duty to do. Our own wisdom and knowledge, our own righteousness and holiness, will vanish out of our sight: and we shall only think of that which stirs the Apostle's soul, when he contemplates the provisions for the salvation of man*—"O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Conscience is his minister; the law of the heart is his writing; the demand for the obedience of thought and will is his word; and yet how small a part is this of that vast dispensation, by which the sting of death, which is sin, was plucked out; and the strength of sin, which is the law, was tamed; and the victory was won for us; and the Conqueror, "having spoiled principalities and powers, made a shew of them, triumphing openly†;" and Death and Sin, and the Law of Moses, and the Law of Nature, all became only as figures belonging to His triumphal procession.

* Rom. xi. 33. † Col. ii. 15.